

## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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### **Deadline Looms for Medicare Beneficiaries**

Nebraska Medicare beneficiaries must make a decision about the new prescription drug benefit by May 15, the last day of initial enrollment into the voluntary program. A penalty could apply to those who do not enroll.

The Nebraska Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) is encouraging those without prescription drug coverage, even those individuals who are not currently taking medications, to consider enrolling in the drug benefit.

“Enrolling by May 15 guarantees a beneficiary will not face a penalty for enrolling later,” said Jina Ragland, SHIIP Coordinator. “It also provides peace of mind in knowing that future prescription needs will be met with the lowest possible cost.”

Qualified Medicare beneficiaries who do not have prescription drug coverage that is as good as Medicare’s face a one percent per month penalty, which amounts to approximately 32 cents each month in 2006, for late enrollment. This penalty will be added to a premium if and when a beneficiary does enroll in a drug benefit, and must be paid indefinitely. After May 15, the next open enrollment period for the drug benefit begins November 15, 2006.

Beneficiaries needing assistance in comparing or enrolling in Medicare prescription plans may contact the Nebraska SHIIP at **1-800-234-7119** for confidential, unbiased counseling.

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“The program may seem confusing, but we can help beneficiaries understand how it will work for them,” Ragland said. “We’re seeing people who will save, on average, between \$800 and \$1,000 in prescription costs each year with this benefit.”

There are approximately 266,600 Medicare beneficiaries in Nebraska, 133,000 of whom have already been enrolled in the drug benefit. An additional 46,400 have prescription coverage from outside creditable coverage sources.

*The Nebraska Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) is part of a national network, funded by a grant from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, that offers unbiased counseling and educational services designed to help senior citizens and those with disabilities make informed decisions on topics related to health insurance. With over 300 volunteers across the state, the Nebraska SHIIP is coordinated within the Nebraska Department of Insurance.*